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SOME folks seem astonished that the Central Intelligence Agency, in a secret ceremony, gave U-2 pilot Gary Powers a medal the other day. The CIA refused to talk about it, but said that it was presented at a private ceremony and that Mr. Powers has been instructed not to wear the medal nor to show it to anyone. It's his own, personal, confidential medal.

You may wonder why the CIA gave him an award for a mission that was such an obvious flop. He got shot down over Russia and then confessed to what he was doing up there.

But they can't fool me. I've read enough Ian Fleming novels to figure it out. I'll bet Mr. Powers has made another, more successful flight. Maybe. Of course, we'll never know, unless Powers should confess again.

But, in the meantime, since he now has a medal that none of us is supposed to see, we'll just have to guess what it looks like: I think it has a beautiful, small silver parachute. Outlined on the canopy of the chute is a U-2 plane with a broken wing. The parachute itself is mounted on a dished surface, greatly resembling an open mouth. In one corner of the mouth, there is a tiny golden foot.

Any medal like this ought to have a secret compartment, containing the ultimate resort of all spies — the death pill. However, this particular death pill probably has a built-in neutralizing agent, which enables the user to take it safely.

Medals for Everyone

DESIGNING the Gary Powers medal was so much fun, I think I'll do a few more, keeping in mind the rules of the game, which

include honoring only those persons who have failed in something, gotten caught doing something or fell far short of the mark for which they were striving.

How about a medal for the Mayor of Selma, Alabama? This could be a lovely thing, a gold medallion showing the skyline of the Nation's Capital. In the place of the Washington Monument, there could be a nice, big All-Day Sucker.

And it shouldn't take long to strike off medals for the pilots who were prevented from providing air cover for the Bay of Pigs invasion. They could pin on their tunics a set of silver wings ... folded.

We could present Billy Sol Estes with hundreds of medals, each a bejeweled replica of a liquid fertilizer tank. This might not be as expensive a proposition as it sounds. We might get away with using only a few medals and just moving and switching them around every night. He'd probably never know the difference.

Bobby Baker's medal would be the most intricate. The former Senate Majority Secretary's would be a double medal. One would show the moonlighting the Capitol. The other would show the Carousel-Motel. The two would be connected with a fine gold chain.

Undercover Medal

IT was learned from one source close to the CIA that the secret medal given to Mr. Powers was "one of those under-the-lapel medals." Frankly, I've never seen one of those medals. Maybe that's why people who have them wear them under their lapels. But from now on, just the knowledge that there are such things is going to save me much embarrassment.

Every time I'm invited to a Washington white tie and tails function, I'm always humiliated that I don't have any fancy medals to hang on it as the diplomats and statesmen do. But, from now on, I'll feel better. Because, for all they'll know, I might be wearing a dozen heroic medals under my lapel.

In fact, this has given me the inspiration for my greatest medal design. It's for the cadets who were kicked out of the Air Force Academy for cheating. This would be a very tiny medal, carrying minute inscriptions of multiplication tables, important dates in history and flying instructions.

This medal would never be worn. It would be concealed under the elastic band of the sock and used whenever necessary.